

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FAMILY COURT, COURT REFORM ORDERS ISSUED BY MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT

LANSING, MI, January 29, 2003 – In the wake of court reform legislation enacted late last year, the Michigan Supreme Court late yesterday issued an order instructing circuit and probate judges to plan for family courts.

The Court also issued an order stating that “courts may establish a plan of concurrent jurisdiction” in counties or judicial circuits that wish to consolidate their trial courts.

The orders are intended to help courts develop plans that are either required or permitted by court reform legislation. 2002 PA 682 deals with family court jurisdiction issues. 2002 PA 678 permits participating courts to have a “plan of concurrent jurisdiction” which consolidates some or all trial court operations.

Currently, most Michigan counties have separate circuit, probate, and district courts. Seven “demonstration project” courts – Barry County, Berrien County, Iron County, Isabella County, Lake County, Washtenaw County, and 46th Circuit (Otsego, Crawford, and Kalkaska counties) – consolidated circuit, probate and district courts into a single trial court. All the judges of the consolidated trial courts may be assigned to any division of the court – family, criminal, civil, etc. – to meet the demands of the court’s workload. A 2001 study by the National Center for State Courts concluded that the demonstration project courts “are generally making more efficient use of judicial and quasi-judicial resources ... than the pre-consolidation courts.” In addition, the demonstration project courts used technology effectively, reduced the amount of time used to resolve cases, and “hastened the delivery of justice to families,” the report stated.

Administrative Order (AO) 2003-1 provides that “[s]ubject to approval by the Supreme Court, a plan of concurrent jurisdiction may be adopted by a majority vote of judges of the participating trial courts.” Plans must address judicial, financial and administrative issues and must be approved by the Supreme Court.

The Court also issued AO 2003-2, which calls for “the chief circuit and chief probate judges in each judicial circuit” to construct a “family court plan” with the input of other judges, court clerks, other court staff, and “other entities that provide services to families within that jurisdiction.” AO 2003-2 states that the family court plan “shall describe how the family

division of the circuit court will operate in that circuit and how to coordinate and promote that which the Legislature has described as ‘more efficient and effective services to families and individuals.’” Family court plans, which are subject to approval by the Supreme Court, must be filed with the State Court Administrative Office no later than July 1, 2003.

The orders may be viewed on the Supreme Court’s website at:

Administrative Order No. 2003-1 (Concurrent Jurisdiction):

<http://www.courts.michigan.gov/supremecourt/Resources/Administrative/2003-1.pdf>

Administrative Order No. 2003-2 (Family Court Plans):

<http://www.courts.michigan.gov/supremecourt/Resources/Administrative/2003-2.pdf>

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